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## **BIG DREAMS, BIG PLANS CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE**

by Roger Valdez, CEO, Bricoleur LLC

Arts organizations, regardless of their discipline or medium, need space. Often organizations don't deal with space issues until the lease is up, the space becomes too expensive, or an owner sells to a developer. People all over the state want the benefits of living in a community with a lively and supported arts and cultural scene. But often the challenges of creating new developments to accommodate growth, including lack of funding or local government support, make it more expensive for smaller arts and cultural organizations to acquire, maintain, and use space for arts and culture.

What can we learn from some successful projects from around our state? They all began with unusual properties, a dream and a plan, and help from local government:

**The United States Forest Service** is placing more than six acres and 17 buildings on the auction block in Twisp. Advocates for maintaining the property for public use have developed a plan and created a Public Development Authority for the purpose of acquisition and development of the property for community uses, including an emphasis on the arts and culture. Ideas include a heritage museum for the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, a new location for the Twisp Public Library, a satellite campus for Wenatchee Valley College and studio, classroom, retail, and workshop spaces for local artists. [www.townoftwisp.com/twisptowncenter](http://www.townoftwisp.com/twisptowncenter)

The Cooper School in West Seattle's Delridge neighborhood long served the families of Youngstown and the South Puget Sound. After it closed, it was determined that the historic building wasn't appropriate for condominiums, and other uses were too expensive. The community, through the neighborhood planning process, developed a dream and a plan to create a cultural center at the old school. The **Youngstown Cultural Center** is now a thriving community cultural center. [www.youngstownarts.org](http://www.youngstownarts.org)

**Cesar Chavez Park** in Seattle's South Park neighborhood was an oddly-shaped, overgrown, fenced-in, junk-filled piece of King County property. The neighborhood wanted a site honoring the civil rights hero, and took action to create the park, which includes a performance space. <http://seattle.gov/parks>

The **Olympic Sculpture Park**, on the last remaining open waterfront space on Seattle's Puget Sound, was built on a site too contaminated for use as recreational space or condos. As the story goes, the dream started with a conversation between Mimi Gardner Gates, Director of Seattle Art Museum and Martha Wyckoff of the Trust for Public Land while on a fly-fishing trip. Their musings turned into a concrete plan which enabled them to raise the funds to create the park. [www.seattleartmuseum.org/visit/OSP](http://www.seattleartmuseum.org/visit/OSP)

**The Confluence Project** emerged as a collaborative effort between tribal and civic groups to commemorate the bicentennial of Lewis and Clark's arrival in the Northwest.

Inspired by artist Maya Lin's creative vision, the plan focused on using seven public spaces along the Columbia River to highlight the journey of the explorers while drawing attention to the importance of the threatened ecology of the Columbia River. Dozens of local governments, tribal elders, and community partners came together to realize the project's dream. [www.confluenceproject.org](http://www.confluenceproject.org)

Each of these projects benefited from developing unusual sites, having a dream and a plan, and receiving help from local government. If you're dreaming about the innovative use of space for artistic and/or cultural purposes in your community, here are some key things to consider:

**Unusual properties:** Often the best properties for art and cultural use are the ones that have flaws or oddities that make them unlikely for commercial development but ideal for arts and cultural use. Whether you own or lease, find out if the property has issues like contamination or unusual zoning (city rules about how property can be used). Is it publicly owned? Is it historically designated?

All the above projects emerged from properties that might not have had a chance of becoming arts and cultural facilities. Having a vision of why a piece of property or space can benefit the broader community will be critical in the long run, even if privately owned.

**What's your dream?** What kind of space do you have or want? Do you want to own, lease or rent? Don't rely on an owner who "really likes us" and will renew a lease forever. Find out more about the owner and their plans and maintain good communication.

**Local government can help:** Once you have found everything you can about your space, you have a plan, a budget, and a strong group of supporters, then approach local government. They can help, but only if you can demonstrate that the plan is supported by the community (which can be defined narrowly, like dancers, or broadly, like the surrounding neighborhood). Local government won't be supportive until there is community momentum behind a plan, with support and funding.

Arts and culture is a business, in that it involves generating money through donated and/or earned income. It is crucial that any organization look at its mission and business model and understand how they relate to help define their space needs. If not having enough or having too much space affects revenue, then space is a problem hurting the sustainability of the organization. Not every organization needs to own a building, but every organization and artist ought to know how space fits into their plans and hopes for the future. Financing is possible if an organization has a capital plan and is sustainable. There are many opportunities for creative developments in cities and towns large and small all over the state. With a dream, a plan, and community support, those opportunities can become realities.

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